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NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

Scoping Documents for Joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp 14 and Shrimp Amendment is Now Available

Tampa, Florida – January 13, 2006 - The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has made available for review and comment draft scoping documents for Joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp 14 and Amendment 15 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The first document, Joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp 14, proposes actions that deal with adjustments to the total allowable catch (TAC) for red snapper, size limits, bag limits, recreational season dates, and the certification of new shrimp bycatch reduction devices (BRDs). The amendment will also look at directed fishery gear restrictions and depth restrictions on the commercial fishery, as well as effort reduction in the shrimp fishery. The second document, Amendment 15 to the Shrimp FMP, will consider such issues as shrimp trawl gear limits, limitations of shrimp vessel permit transferability, further reducing bycatch, shrimp fishery bycatch quota and quota monitoring, shrimp effort reduction, latent permits and enforcement actions. Documents are now available and can be obtained online at www.gulfcouncil.org/downloads.htm, or by contacting the Council at 813-348-1630.

Interested parties are encouraged to participate in the process by attending meetings or providing written comments. Written comments should be no later than March 6, 2006. [Scoping meetings](#) have been scheduled throughout the gulf coast to give the public an opportunity to provide input on the types of management changes the Council should consider. A total of ten scoping meetings will be held, from Brownsville, Texas, to Key West, Florida, to receive comments on the draft documents, as well as other comments that may help address the goals of the amendments. Public input will be used by the Council to further develop the amendments.

Characteristics of Florida Bay Used to Predict Other Potential Mercury Hotspots

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) is developing methods to identify coastal areas that have high mercury concentrations in fish. This will help coastal managers make better decisions to remediate affected areas and protect human health. NCCOS research has documented the high mercury concentrations in fish from eastern Florida Bay. Using data from NOAA's National Estuarine Eutrophication Assessment, NCCOS scientists are working to identify several other estuaries likely to have high mercury concentrations. They are also using data from NOAA's National Status and Trends Program and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to test predictions. For more information contact [David W. Evans](#).

Other NOAA News

NOAA Names John H. Dunnigan Assistant Administrator for NOAA's National Ocean Service

John H. Dunnigan, currently director of NOAA Fisheries Service's Office of Sustainable Fisheries, has been named as the new assistant administrator for the NOAA Ocean Service by retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D, undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. Read the [full story](#).

In the Gulf States:

Charlotte Harbor NEP Update

This year, the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP) is undertaking one of the most important and challenging missions of an NEP, the update of our *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan* (CCMP). The CCMP is the guiding document for all of our policies, legislative actions, outreach projects, research initiatives and restoration activities. The update of this document reaffirms our priorities and areas of consensus. The update process also allows us to include issues that are bound to emerge in this fast-paced world of ours. Over the course of the past year, our participants generated a “needs list” of recommended actions to protect our estuaries and watersheds. Through this exercise, 209 separate needed actions were identified. We developed a survey based on these needs and requested that all of our participants complete it. If you have not submitted one, you are still welcome to do so. Go to www.chnep.org/CCMP/CCMPupdateSTEP2.htm and send the completed survey to lbeever@swfrpc.org. Your input through completion of the survey is still valuable.

Mississippi River Reintroduction Into Bayou Lafourche Project

Another project that aims to improve the quality of habitat and ensure a safe supply of drinking water for the 300,000-plus residents of the Bayou Region is the Mississippi River Reintroduction Into Bayou Lafourche Project. This important coastal restoration and protection project has just completed its Phase One Report, which was a massive effort to screen 144 different design alternatives through rigorous screening criteria, and narrow that wide field to the best 7 design alternatives. The remaining seven projects focus on maximizing the benefits of more Mississippi River water in Bayou Lafourche while minimizing negative impacts to bayouside residents. To learn more in detail about the findings of this report, and about all the remaining design alternatives, visit www.bayoulafourche.org, or contact Joni Blanchard at BTNEP by phone at (985) 447-0868, or by email at Joni@btnep.org to obtain a copy of this report on CD.

Charting the Course to 2015 in Galveston Bay

Have a say in Galveston Bay! The Galveston Bay Estuary Program is hosting a series of Galveston Bay Community Open Houses to ensure that this valuable resource remains a source of pleasure and economic development over the next 10 years and beyond. This initiative is part of the Galveston Bay Estuary Plan, a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for the Galveston Bay ecosystem. The Plan was developed by consensus among citizens representing industry, business, development, academic, and government entities in a process that culminated in 1995. The [open houses](#) will address the following aspects of Galveston Bay:

- Fish and Wildlife
- Public Access
- Recreation
- Open Space and Natural Areas
- Coastal Hazards
- Communities Culture and Change
- Water Quality and Public Health

For more information please contact: Scott Jones, Galveston Bay Estuary Program Public Information Officer, 281/486-1245; sjones@tceq.state.tx.us.

Luck of the Irish Floats Toward Island: Mitigation Plan to Help Nurture the Ecosystem

Copyright 2005 Corpus Christi Caller-Times. All rights reserved. By Kathryn Garcia

CORPUS CHRISTI, TX, Jan 12, 2006 - Shamrock Island soon will be transformed into a more diverse ecosystem thanks to a \$1.25 mitigation plan to help prevent further erosion and spark the growth of seagrass, the basis in marine food chains. Workers have hurried to construct 11 breakwaters using 11,000 limestone rocks before the start of bird nesting season next month, said Monika De La Garza, spokeswoman for the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program.

"Thousands and thousands flocks of birds each year spend time eating and nesting here," De La Garza said. "It's one of the most important colonial water bird nesting islands in the Coastal Bend." The barriers will quiet the water near the 110-acre island, creating the right temperature, soil and water depth for seagrass growth, which will provides food for fish, shrimp, and other organisms, De La Garza said. Read the rest of this article online in the [Corpus Christi Caller-Times](#).

Other News

EPA Posts Results from Samples taken in Hurricane Affected Areas of Mississippi

(1/13/06) On Jan. 13, 2006 EPA posted results from soil and sediment samples collected near hazardous waste facilities or facilities that handle hazardous substances in the hurricane affected areas of Mississippi. These samples were taken to determine if flooding from the storm surge released hazardous constituents and materials. The facilities being investigated are located in the

storm surge impacted portions of Hancock, Harrison and Jackson Counties in Mississippi, and include Sonford Products; Chemfax, Inc.; DuPont DeLisle - Pass Christian; Chevron Pascagoula; First Chemical; Mississippi Phosphates; Omega Protein - Moss Point; Port Bienville Industrial Park (Polychemie, Inc.); and Ershigs Fiberglass, Inc.

Based on the sampling results, EPA does not believe these sites were impacted by Hurricane Katrina. EPA's conclusions regarding the potential impact of the hurricane on these sites are based on a comparison of post-hurricane data to available past sample data collected during facility investigations or routine monitoring activities. In addition, the results were compared to EPA Region 9 Preliminary Remediation Goals (PRGs) to determine if conditions at the sites might represent previously unrecognized risks to human health and the environment. EPA Region 9 PRGs (available at: <http://www.epa.gov/region9/waste/sfund/prg/index.html>) are conservative risk-based concentrations based on long-term exposures in either a residential or commercial/industrial setting. They are considered by EPA to be protective for people (including sensitive groups) over a lifetime. For more detailed information on these results, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/katrina/testresults>. Contact: Eryn Witcher, 202-564-4355 / witcher.eryn@epa.gov.

Energy

Sempra LNG Begins FERC Approval Process to Expand Cameron LNG Terminal

Sempra LNG 1/10/2006 URL: http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=28416

Sempra LNG, a unit of Sempra Energy reports it has received approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to begin the mandatory pre-filing process to expand the company's Cameron LNG receipt terminal's production capacity to 2.65 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day (Bcf/day) from 1.5 Bcf/day. The formal application for the expansion will be filed later this year at the completion of the pre-filing process. The final FERC decision on that liquefied natural gas (LNG) receipt terminal expansion application is expected in early 2007.

“Because of its prime location on the Gulf Coast with access to the Midwest and East Coast markets, we have received enough interest from LNG suppliers for additional capacity at our Cameron terminal to begin the approval process,” said Darcel L. Hulse, president of Sempra LNG. “We want to be prepared to meet the needs of the market as it develops.”

The initial construction phase of Cameron LNG is underway near Lake Charles, La., and is slated for completion in late 2008. The proposed expansion is expected to commence in 2007 and be completed in 2010. Under provisions of the recent energy bill passed by Congress, all LNG facility applications must now undergo the pre-filing process. This is the same process that Sempra LNG voluntarily used for its Port Arthur, Texas, LNG terminal filing, before FERC made the pre-filing process mandatory. The proposed \$250 million expansion of the LNG receipt terminal will involve the addition of gas processing facilities and one new LNG storage tank, requiring the development of an additional 15 acres of the 275-acre site. When the expansion is complete, there will be a total of four LNG storage tanks at Cameron LNG, each capable of storing 160,000 cubic meters of LNG. Cameron LNG is located near the Gulf Coast along the

Calcasieu River, about 15 miles south of Lake Charles. In April 2004, the FERC authorized the project's construction and operation.

In early 2005, Sempra LNG announced it had awarded the engineering, construction and procurement contracts for Cameron LNG to a consortium comprised of Aker Kvaerner of Norway and Tokyo-based Ishikawajima-Harima Heavy Industries. Sempra LNG also is building an LNG receipt terminal in Baja California, Mexico -- Energia Costa Azul -- which will be the first on North America's West Coast when it is completed in early 2008. The company is in the final stage of licensing Port Arthur LNG and construction is estimated to begin in 2007. LNG is natural gas that has been cooled below minus-260 degrees Fahrenheit and condensed into a liquid. LNG occupies 600 times less space than in its gaseous state, which allows it to be shipped in cryogenic tankers from remote locations to markets where it is needed. At the receiving terminal, LNG is unloaded and stored until it is vaporized back into natural gas and moved via pipelines to customers.

California Regulators Adopt \$2.9 Billion Solar Power Plan

January 13, 2006 — By Leonard Anderson, Reuters

SAN FRANCISCO — The California Public Utilities Commission Thursday approved a \$2.9 billion program to make California one of the world's largest producers of solar power. The "California Solar Initiative," backed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, aims to add 3,000 megawatts of solar energy over 11 years through the installation of 1 million rooftop solar energy systems on homes, businesses, farms, schools and public buildings. That amount of electricity would be equivalent to about six new power stations. The measure was approved on a 3-to-1 vote with one commissioner recusing himself because of a possible conflict of interest. Michael Peevey, president of the commission, said the effort "is designed to create a sustainable solar industry" and to demonstrate California's leadership in moving to reduce dependence on fossil fuels to produce energy. If the program is fully implemented, California would become the world's third-largest solar generator behind Japan and Germany. The state currently has about 100 megawatts of solar electricity. The program will offer rebates for adding solar systems and is expected to give a big boost to manufacturers of solar power generating cells and panels. An industry official said the commission's decision will give investors more certainty about the future of solar electricity.

"This is a phenomenal decision. The regulatory environment has been the number one uncertainty for the investment community. This long-term program provides the certainty we have been sorely lacking," said Howard Wenger, executive vice president of privately held PowerLight Corp., a Berkeley, California-based solar systems developer. The money for the program will come from existing funds already earmarked for solar energy and gas and electric utility rates. The average residential utility bill would go up by 65 cents a month, according to Environment California, a solar power supporter. Solar spending could save California utility customers an estimated \$9 billion from a reduced need to build new power plants and purchase electricity supplies during high demand days in the summer, according to a commission report.

Schwarzenegger pushed a solar energy bill in the state legislature last year, but it stalled amid policy disputes and amendments. The Republican governor's energy goals call for making renewable energy like solar and wind power 20 percent of California's electricity resources by 2017.

Controls Needed Before Drilling Allowed Off Virginia's Coast

by Scott Harper, The Virginian-Pilot, Norfolk, Va. 1/11/2006

URL: http://www.rigzone.com/news/article.asp?a_id=28476

Virginia should allow exploration of natural gas and oil deposits off its coast, but only after thorough and careful attention to potential environmental harm, a study prepared for Gov. Mark Warner and state lawmakers concludes. The report released late Tuesday by Secretary of Commerce and Trade Michael J. Schewel recommends that no drilling occur within 50 miles of the coast, that no pipeline or infrastructure be built on Virginia's Eastern Shore and that any exploration seek both natural gas and oil on the outer continental shelf of the Atlantic Ocean. While suggesting that offshore drilling "can be safely undertaken with the proper controls," the report noted that pursuing new supplies of fossil fuels should only be one prong in a comprehensive energy strategy. Energy efficiency, Schewel wrote, should be the "backbone" of that strategy, along with a mix of alternative sources as well as the expanded exploitation of existing ones.

The report comes as state lawmakers descend on Richmond for the start of a new legislative session under Democratic Gov.-elect Tim Kaine. One big item for debate will be an energy bill sponsored by state Sen. Frank W. Wagner, R-Virginia Beach, who wants Washington to renew offshore gas exploration off Virginia's coast. The practice has been banned since 1990 and would take an act of Congress to overturn. Wagner sponsored a bill last year urging the moratorium be lifted. However, after protests from Virginia Beach City Hall and environmental groups concerned about possible spills and damage to tourism, Warner vetoed the idea and helped to create a study of the issue.

An advisory panel chaired by Schewel that included energy experts, industry officials, lawmakers and environmentalists met three times last summer and fall in preparing the report released Tuesday. "Overall, it sounds pretty responsible," said Mike Town, state director of the Sierra Club. "There's definitely more questions than answers on this issue ... but I'm pleased with the results of the study." The report, which the state Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy helped to draft, said there is little definitive proof of what lies in the deep mud and sand off Virginia. The federal Minerals Management Service has estimated that the outer continental shelf along the entire Atlantic coast could hold as much as 33.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 3.5 billion barrels of oil. Virginia accounts for only about 11 percent of that underwater potential, the report found, with estimated profits ranging wildly from "zero to over \$10 billion." "Accordingly, the Commonwealth should not have unrealistic expectations about the likelihood or the amount of potential revenue or economic activity derived from such potential reserves," the report said.

Environmentally, the study noted how North Carolina in 1990 found that possible exploration off Manteo was deemed incompatible with its coastal zone management rules, and that Virginia should pursue a similar analysis, regardless of the outcome. It warned about possible spills from hurricanes or future pipelines and urged careful review of safety protocol. The report also concluded that Virginia should not anticipate any new supplies being tapped for at least another decade, "and probably longer."

Training and Conferences

January - Citizen's Water Quality Monitoring Workshop

In January, the Barataria Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) will be co-hosting a two-day workshop on the importance of water quality to the health of our estuary at LUMCON in Cocodrie. This free workshop, to be held on January 20th and 21st, will allow estuary residents the opportunity to learn from scientists how water quality impacts our quality of life, and how to sample water and test water for various pollutants. Thanks to EPA and the Ocean Conservancy, participants will be able to not only attend this workshop for free, but also to spend the weekend in one of the great recreational fishing destinations in coastal Louisiana and learn more about their estuarine resources. For more information about this workshop, and future citizen's water quality monitoring efforts by BTNEP, visit: <http://volunteer.btneep.org/default.asp?id=22>

To register for this workshop, contact Andrew Barron or Joni Blanchard at BTNEP by phone at (985) 447-0868, or via email at Andrew@btneep.org or Joni@btneep.org.

Annual Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' Meeting

Start registering now for the Annual Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' Meeting by going to: <http://www.coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/pmm/welcome.html>. Registration forms can be filled out and sent via email from the College of William and Mary Conference Services link on the web site. There is also a link to see and print the draft meeting agenda. We will update the agenda with speaker names as soon as possible.

We hope all of you will make flight arrangements to accommodate the Thursday morning plenary from 9:30-11:30am on Planning Perspectives on Hurricane Katrina. We are looking forward to interesting discussions and presentations by invited speakers.

2006 National Hurricane Conference

April 10-14: The Rosen Centre Hotel Orlando, FL

So overwhelming was the avalanche of hurricanes last year that, inevitably, a number of mistakes were made in the local, state and federal response to those storms. And so this will be the focus of our 28th national conference—to see how and when and where the problems developed and to try to come up with better plans and strategies to apply in the future. For more information, visit the conference [website](#).

Challenges in Coastal Hydrology and Water Quality, 25th Anniversary Annual Meeting & International Conference

Source: <http://www.aihydro.org> (13 Sept. 2005)

More than half the world's population lives within a distance of 100 km from the coastline, and this number is expected to increase by 25% in the coming two decades. The population growth

and urbanization have largely altered the natural pathways of coastal waters that are vital to the coastal environment. As most of the water on land surface enters into the oceans, man's activities in both coastal and inland watersheds have led to increased loading of sediment, toxic substances, nutrients and pathogens with subsequent eutrophication, algal blooms, and hypoxia. Climate change has led to the rise in sea level with loss of coastal wetlands and to increased saltwater intrusion. The world's coasts are facing increasingly serious environmental challenges, while it is not clear how to fully measure the complexities of coastal systems.

This conference aims to provide an international forum for the dissemination and exchange of information in coastal hydrology, hydraulics and water quality. The conference will stimulate interdisciplinary research, education, management, and policy making from physical, biogeochemical, and socioeconomic perspectives related to complex environmental systems in coastal regions. Discussions will also take place on hydraulic engineering and structures in coastal areas, which are frequently densely populated or sites of major industrial development. The topic of coastal petroleum and land subsidence will also be addressed.

Location: Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Dates: May 21-24, 2006

Early Registration Deadline: March 15, 2006

Abstract/Proposal Submission Deadline: October 30, 2005

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Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov